The Content Marketing Fallacy

By

Dr D Price
#thinkdifferent – get results
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TOO BAD IF YOU WANT TO BE A CONTENT MARKETER

So here I am tackling another fight I won't win. There are way too many 'gurus' with vested interests espousing the rise and rise of content marketing for one person to turn the tide. So as before, this fad will have to go through the natural cycle to eventual obsolescence. (The only question is how much time/resources will be wasted on this before it happens.)

Content Marketing is a wannabe discipline and people's fascination with it is entirely built on a logical fallacy.

I am sure every reader can cast their mind back to a recent sports broadcast where a commentator would say something to similar to this:

> ***The team is going so well but they are struggling to score because the last pass is always going to ground.***

Or if you aren't a sports fan, I am sure you have heard the expression.

> ***The keys are always in the last place I looked.***

The question is: is there any other place the keys could have been – BUT the last place? Was there any other pass that could have been dropped but the last one?

And it is the same thing with the notion of content marketing.

> ***Is internet marketing even possible without 'content?***

At every opportunity wannabe gurus jump on anything that looks like it can become a bandwagon and claim to be a 'leader' with whatever the next big thing is, and they flog it to corporates who suffer a terminal case of FOMO.

The image below came up in a Google search, and whether it was or wasn't is not the point here, but it would have been something LIKE this.

World Wide Web

The WorldWideWeb (W3) is a wide-area hypermedia information retrieval initiative aiming to give universal access to a large universe of documents.

Everything there is online about W3 is linked directly or indirectly to this document, including an executive summary of the project, Mailing lists , Policy , November's W3 news , Frequently Asked Questions .

What's out there?
Pointers to the world's online information, subjects , W3 servers, etc.
Help
on the browser you are using
Software Products
A list of W3 project components and their current state. (e.g. Line Mode ,X11 Viola , NeXTStep , Servers , Tools , Mail robot , Library)
Technical
Details of protocols, formats, program internals etc
Bibliography
Paper documentation on W3 and references.
People
A list of some people involved in the project.
History
A summary of the history of the project.
How can I help ?

Look at again and you will notice that it nothing but (links to) CONTENT. Read the definition of the World Wide Web again: a wide-area hypermedia information retrieval initiative aiming to give universal access to a large universe documents.

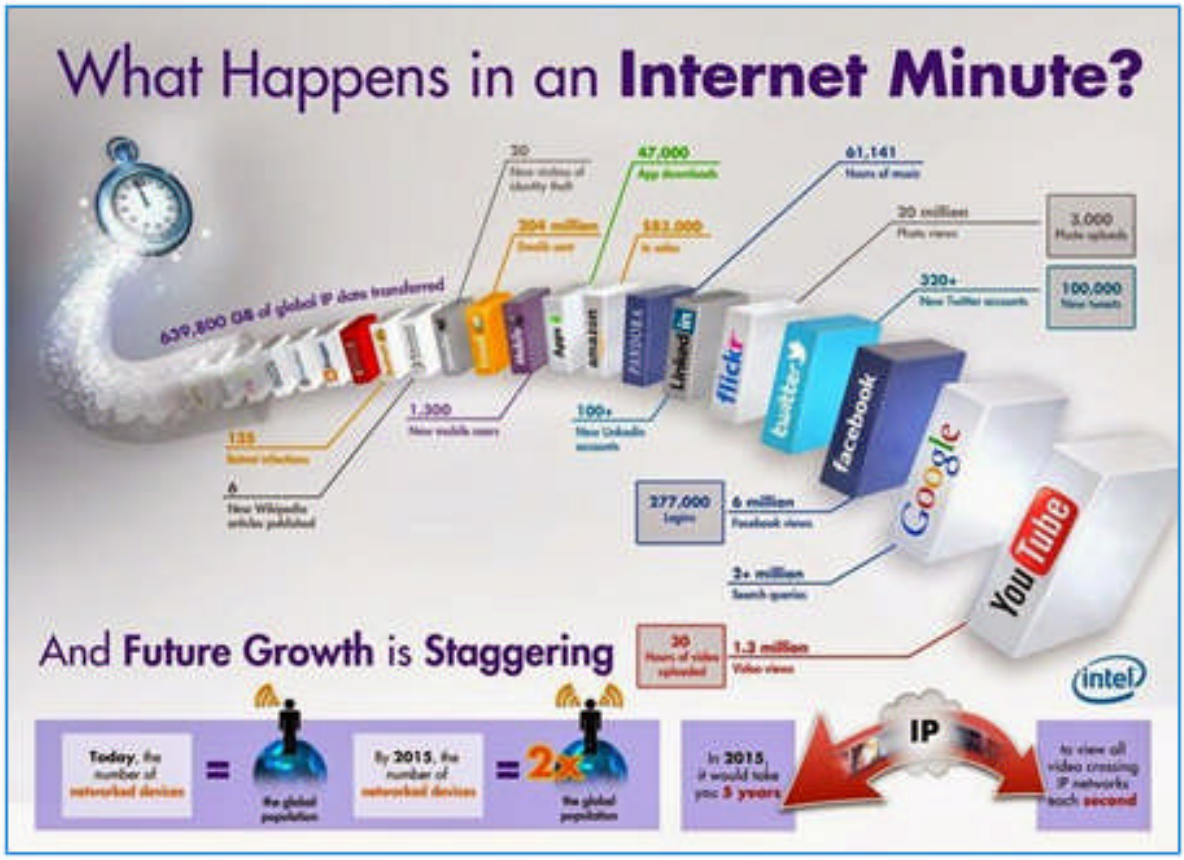
The only thing that has changed is the different 'document' formats have emerged enabling multi-media in addition to documents.

FACT #1: THE INTERNET IS CONTENT.

This implies that coming up with a term like Content Marketing would be exactly the same as saying traditional marketing is (for example) Communication Marketing – and THEN claiming that 'communication marketing' is different and has special taxonomies and special skills and you need to a special kind of guru to be a communication marketer. I hope it is obvious that all marketing is communication and adding an unwarranted adjunct adds no meaningful value.
Here is a great infographic on my Pinterest account that explains what happens in ONE internet minute.

> ***In 2015, it will take us 5 YEARS to watch the amount of video that is uploaded in ONE minute onto the internet.***

Study the infographic and tell me how easy it is to create content that will actually be found?



I am sure it boggles your mind as it does mine. There is really only one conclusion that one can draw.

FACT #2: THERE IS A LOT OF CONTENT – AND MORE IS COMING.

This means that even if there was such a thing as content marketing then it is going to become increasingly difficult – to the point of irrelevance.

Of course there are better and worse ways to organise and present your information on the internet and if that is all that content marketing is, then I will leave it at that.

But Content Marketing is really a statement of the bleeding obvious when it comes to the internet and unless a 'content marketer' can develop a model that will a-priori determine what content will be viral, I can't see it adding much value to our understanding of how and why people buy and what we can do to use that in a marketing context that we cannot already do.

More neologisms is the last thing we need.

Since a new label of and by itself adds no real value, I prefer to use the time-proven frameworks to leverage new insights.

FACT #3: EVEN IF YOU PUT DOWN THE KOOL-AID FOR A MOMENT, YOU STILL MUST FIGURE OUT WHAT IS NEXT.

All content is information and all information that exists to drive sales is a form of 'advertising'. And advertising has traditionally been organised around the following three goals: Inform, Persuade, and Remind.

So, when I look to understand the future of marketing and advertising (getting people to buy stuff) I look at how other social and technological changes will drive change within existing frameworks without adding pop-culture bling to our marketing literature because we suffer from Neophilia.

So considering the three traditional core objectives of Advertising, one might speculate how these may change or how they may be impacted by change.

REMIND

It seems that advertising won't need to play that role much in the future. The internet of things will obviate the need for reminders via third party communications channels – the reminders will be built into the product, into monitors and/or wearable computers.

PERSUADE

Already the dominant paradigm is one that avoids overt persuasion. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware and informed of traditional marketing tactics. Even Neuromarketing and all the associated heuristics are relative accessible by the everyday consumer via popular blogs and even mainstream media programs. (After watching a TV show like 'Lieto Me', everyone is a body language expert.)

Persuasion is (and should be) now practiced in a more 'organic' format – where the marketer is respectful of consumer's 'rights' and most marketers live by the prevailing desire to be 'authentic'. This of course makes outright persuasion effectively illegitimate.

INFORM

Information that simply informs is not of any particular use. One should consider the subsets of information that consumers may want and that is (a) entertainment and (b) education.

As a marketer it seems to me that if we want our content to be found and to be have an impact, it must be either entertaining or educational.

Marketing as a professional discipline struggles because its practitioners are constantly jumping on the next band wagon, proclaiming "this is the big thing". Social media – and a specific range of platforms come to mind and of course then there is the other buzz word – Big Data.

(I read somewhere that Big Data is like Teenage Sex – everyone thinks everyone else is doing it and therefore claim they are doing it, but the reality is there is much groping in the dark and not much else.)

By labelling what we do as "Customer Education" and claiming that it is the new marketing, I run the risk that the same fate will befall it; a slow, agonising death until all that remains are a few abandoned websites in the Google graveyard.

The current crop of young marketers who are 'discovering' social mistakenly believe that they have discovered something amazingly unique about consumers. People are social. It doesn't take more than a moment's reflection to realise that humans have ALWAYS been social.

The only thing that has changed is that (1) it is easier for people to use technology to express their social nature and (b) the social dimension of decision-making has shifted power to the consumer because brands are no longer custodians of the information needed to make decisions.

By the same token, marketing has always been about customer education.

When a manufacturer includes a user manual in their packaging, they are attempting to educate the customer.

The reason I believe content marketing is a dead end (in addition to those already enumerated) is that content marketing (as it is practised today) is biased towards entertainment – as can be seen from the unrealistic and counter-productive focus on creating something viral.

Content can be entertaining and it can be educational. It can even be both at the same time. But pure entertainment is not – in our experience - a viable, effective and sustainable marketing strategy unless your product/service is an entertainment product (like XBOX).

By definition someone who wants to be 'entertained' always wants to move on to the next thing… which goes against the grain of the organisational objective of creating loyal and repeat customers.

At best, content marketing is part of your digital marketing strategy which is part of your overall marketing strategy.

Customer education is a nobler endeavour.

Personally, (and this is a function of being in the B2B space) I would tend to avoid content that exists for the sake of entertainment in order to achieve commercial objectives.

Watching the latest Old Spice advertisement is entertaining and for many reasons that are only clear ex post facto, and there is a concomitant commercial impact. (Other examples would be in-flight safety demonstration videos being used to promote an airlines brand in a different environment in a different way.) Entertainment as marketing is a legitimate strategy.

I believe it is less relevant in the B2B space and it is in any event it is much harder to create entertainment that has commercial outcomes. By definition entertainment is difficult and subjective and people seeking entertainment are fickle, and marketers who take the long shot that their entertaining content will change consumer behaviour must think carefully.

OUR CORE MARKETING OBJECTIVE IS CUSTOMER EDUCATION.

Ganador focuses on client/customer/member acquisition, retention and engagement for the B2B market in the retail supply chain. In practice what this means is that we develop strategies/ products (solutions) that will help our clients acquire/retain customers **by educating them.**

A few examples to illustrate from our business:

> When we work with a shopping centre manager to retain a tenant that has fallen on hard times, we engage, advise, support the tenant BUT do it in such way that we are actually educating the retailer and the shopping centre manager.
>
> When we work with an association to increase their membership base, we don't typically suggest ads in the trade press. That is a valid strategy, but it is not what we do. Instead we will focus on how we can leverage the IP that exists in the Association to make membership more attractive and beneficial – and educate their (prospective) members.

In essence, we think the 'marketing' that will survive will be marketing that is USEFUL. If you can reformat your marketing message to be useful by making it educational, it will have a sustainable basis for building relationships.

MARKETING IS **LIKE** EDUCATION:

1. At its heart it is a form of gentle leading.
2. It's people-centric: about the recipient, not the 'sender'.
3. You remember the great experiences.
4. It is sustained. (It is a life-long journey)
5. It is sustainable.
6. It is sustaining.
7. Technology is an enabler, not a substitute.
8. It is rewarding (everybody benefits).
9. It is authentic.
10. It is a form of conversation.
11. The fundamentals never change (and it will survive the buzzwords).
12. The best system creates a virtuous circle of beneficiaries.
13. The benefits last forever.
14. You can share, expose, challenge, inform, teach – but you cannot MAKE anyone love it.
15. You can't fake it (the 'kids' will catch you out in a blink)

The revealing power of knowledge and truth will reveal the heart of the brand.

If you genuinely believe your brand is the right solution then you will seek and embrace this exposure. Instead of 'influencing' the customer to buy, they become driven to buy because they **know** the product/brand is the best fit for them.

That is the most powerful outcome for any brand AND the most ideal result for the consumer.

Marketing as education requires a mind-set change as well as a new set of tools and strategies. Some activities may appear superficially the same as those previously executed – but just like a philosophy lecture and class-room show and tell may 'look the same' and appear in the same setting and involve one-to-many communication exercise, they are in effect very different.

A marketing activity may LOOK like a training workshop, but it is not.

It may look like a consulting gig, but it may be an engagement exercise.

It really just depends on intent – and the philosophy behind the execution; but good marketing is education is marketing.

If we are right, then this trend has practical implication for all businesses.

- When commercial organisations use education as a competitive differentiator it will seriously and materially impact organisational institutions.
- The way commercial organisations interact with their customers/clients will change – and in particular the sales process will change in format, frequency and content as the objective changes. (We have created a **Checklist for Retail Representatives** to stimulate your thoughts on this topic and you can get this from the same area on the website – ganador.com.au.)

The implications for retailers specifically (using the example of a fashion retailer) are also significant.

- Instead of Facebook posts that shout 'new in store, buy now' – focus on giving them what's hot in fashion right now; that is - an education in style & trends.
- Instead of simply selling your dress, teach them which make-up colours go best with that outfit
- Since people buy fashion to FIT IN with their peer group, give them some tips and tools to achieve that – without overtly referring to your product
- Create a community around your blog where your fans can educate each other (sharing tips and shortcuts) is a form of crowdsourcing your education efforts – which is pretty smart.

It also has implications if you are a competitor of ours. We are happy to give even our competitors some pointers in the right direction because the reality is that eventually they will see the light anyway, and being first is not the greatest competitive advantage for us.

When you are at the forefront of innovation and practising cutting edge techniques, you have to not only sell your particular 'value', you must persuade the client that the new approach or the new technology (or whatever is at the cutting edge) is the right one.

The more practitioners out there delivering the same message makes it easier for us to sell our particular offer, so we welcome all competitors into the fold.

We like to think we are on the cutting edge of marketing of course. But in the final analysis, what we are promoting here is nothing but the most foundational truth of all marketing – giving the customer what they want.

And what they want (now as ever) is to be helped to live their lives better.

CONTACT US

If you are a wholesaler, brand, distributor, franchisor, publisher, landlord or service provider seeking to engage your clients/customers & members with sustainable business relationships and …

WANT TO DO IT SMARTER

… we will be happy to talk.

Dr Dennis Price

dennis@ganador.com.au

[m] 0411 030 436

@dennisprice

Moonyeen Price

moonyeen@ganador.coim.au

[m] 0408 200 590

@pricefx

GANADOR.COM.AU